



State of Connecticut

SENATE

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Feb. 11, 2015

Esteemed chairs and members of the Transportation Committee:

I am Senator Tony Hwang, and I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 480.

This bill would put out to bid the operation of the New Haven Line of Metro-North Railroad, to give Connecticut a greater say in the operations of this busiest-in-the-nation passenger railroad system and bring more accountability and a higher quality of service and safety in the management and operations.

The sad, simple truth is that Metro-North has failed Connecticut residents and businesses.

Over the past two years, under Metro-North's watch, there have been four derailments, including two on the same day just a few weeks ago, as well as the one in Bridgeport in May 2013 that injured more than 70 people and another in December of that year that killed four people and also injured more than 70.

Federal investigations have determined that the derailments were caused, in part, due to a culture at the railroad that placed on-time performance above safety. That is simply unacceptable – nothing should ever be more important than public safety.

Metro-North did rightfully feel pressure to improve its on-time performance, as the railroad has a well-documented record of unreliability – which I'm sure any rail commuter would quickly attest.

The sub-standard service being delivered by Metro-North is not only unacceptable under Connecticut's contract; it is a quality of life issue with major economic implications. Every delay and interruption in service is less time residents have with their families, and they undermine our state's efforts to encourage more people to utilize mass transit as an alternative to our over-congested highways. Further, those delays and extended service interruptions have actual costs that negatively affect our state and national economy.

Consider this fact taken from testimony in October 2013 by a member of Connecticut's Congressional delegation, on the heels of a power outage that resulted in major service interruptions on the railroad line:

"The analysis conducted by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development estimates the incident cost the Connecticut economy \$62 million and reduced state revenues by \$2 million and, beyond that, interrupted lives of approximately 62,500 Metro-North commuters over the eight work days that work was suspended."

We've seen this time and again: issues arise and Metro-North goes into reaction mode. And while new leadership at Metro-North has taken encouraging steps amidst increasing pressure from federal investigators and the Connecticut legislature, including the leadership of this very Committee, we still have a long way to go before we can say with absolute confidence that service is safe and reliable.

I was actually shocked to learn that our current contract with Metro-North does not include any performance measures. How can that be?

The bottom line is that we can and must do better, and the time to act is now.

In closing, I think the most important question we all have to ask ourselves is this: Are we satisfied with the level of service we are receiving from Metro-North? If your answer is no then I implore you to vote in support of SB 480.

Thank you.

Tony Hwang
State Senator, 28th District